

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

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October 16, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR:

GENERAL SCOWCROFT

FROM:

BUD McFARLANE *RCM*

SUBJECT:

The Significance of Attrition Ratios  
During the First Ten Days

Notwithstanding its superior combat effectiveness, the disparity in absolute force strength between Israel and the combined Arab armies (Egypt, Syria, and Iraq) has lead Israel to execute a strategy calling for the quick decisive destruction of Arab fire power. In the current conflict, the viability of this strategy was compromised to some extent at the outset, due to the Arab initiation of combat. Nevertheless, it has been the view [redacted] that superior Israeli 25X1 combat effectiveness would be able to turn the tide and reverse initial setbacks. Spot reports since the outbreak of fighting have tended to confirm the assumed Israeli superiority. After ten days, however, an analysis of the cumulative losses on both sides, reflects that these spot reports were at least incomplete and perhaps erroneous in reporting comparative losses. Some statistical comparisons illustrate the point.

- At the commencement of hostilities, the ratio of Arab to Israeli fighter attack aircraft was 2.45 to 1. After ten days fighting, it is 2.37 to 1, only marginally improved.
- At the commencement of hostilities, the ratio of Arab to Israeli tanks was 2.52 to 1. During the first ten days, it has worsened to 2.79 to 1.

Such a superficial analysis does not by any means refute the assumption of Israeli unit superiority, but may suggest that when absolute strengths become greatly disparate, the Israeli advantage becomes less relevant. Stated in other terms, an Israeli tanker up against two Syrian tanks may be capable of destroying 1.75 tanks. However, when placed against three Syrian tanks, his kill ratio drops to .90.

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A corollary proposition concerns the impact of US resupply efforts. For so long as replacement items only restore the armament balance, we cannot expect an Israeli reversal of the worsening trend. To the contrary, restoring the pre-war balance would delay, but not reverse the deterioration of the Israeli position.

With respect to troop losses, statistics tend to confirm the assumption of Israeli superiority (Arab losses to date more than four times those of Israel), but as well place in relief the inability of Israel to sustain a war of attrition (original troop strength ratio 1.59 to 1; current ratio 1.57 to 1). The impact of Arab advantage over time will become more apparent in the days ahead as Israeli forces that have been in combat for ten days begin to face fresh Iraqi, and reasonably fresh Egyptian forces.

The significance of the above is understood by the Israeli leadership and may, in fact, be reflected in some of their recent operations. Faced with the diminishing prospect for defeating the Arab forces, there are signs that the Israeli forces may seek to establish strong points offering political bargaining strength. The thrust across the canal last evening would seem to support this thesis.

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